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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State health department receives national award from March of Dimes

Success at reducing rate of preterm births acknowledged

ANCHORAGE — The Department of Health and Social Services was recognized today for its efforts in Alaska to reduce the rate of preterm births. The March of Dimes *Virginia Apgar Prematurity Campaign Award* was presented to Alaska's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ward Hurlburt, by March of Dimes State Director Janie Odgers. The presentation was made Sept. 27 during the morning general session of the department's Maternal Child Health and Immunization conference being held in Anchorage.

To encourage more full-term deliveries, the March of Dimes initiated a national campaign in 2003 aimed at reducing the rate of preterm births. The goal was for states to reduce their rate by 8 percent by 2014. Alaska was recognized for having reduced its rate by 15.7 percent between 2009 and 2010.

"This award is a reflection of the systematic effort and dedication of health care providers of obstetrical and newborn care, health care organizations throughout Alaska, and our staff in the Section of Women's, Children's and Family Health who partnered together over the last 30 years to achieve these gratifying results," Hurlburt said after accepting the award.

Babies born before the 39-week full-term mark are at risk for health challenges due to under-developed lungs, brain and nervous systems. These babies require more hospital care and longer hospital stays than full-term babies, and often experience lifelong delays in growth and development.

In the United States, one in eight babies is born prematurely. Worldwide, 13 million babies are born too soon each year — 1 million of whom die. Nov. 17 is World Prematurity Day when the March of Dimes works to focus the world's attention on the serious problem of premature birth.

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